

Carroll County ATC Anti-Bullying Project

Statistics show an alarming number of students endure bullying even though many states including Kentucky have passed laws to make it a crime. It is estimated that one out of three children have been bullied and one out of three have been bullies themselves.

Melanie Ransdell and Kasey Hunter are best friends, victims of bullying and the newest crusaders against it. The two Carroll County Area Technology Center students are using a HOSA Future Health Professionals project and their own experiences as a way to teach elementary students about bullying. They have developed a presentation as part of their Health Sciences class designed to educate others about the dangers of the practice and how to make their schools bully-free zones.

“I saw a lot of people getting bullied and I wanted to make a difference so I sat down one day and put my thoughts together and want to get the word out there to get it stopped,” said Ransdell. “We may not get it all stopped but we can make the percentages go down.”

Bullying takes on different forms from name calling and torment, to physical contact. Ransdell added that it not only happens at school but others places, as well like at work, at home and even over the internet.

The two students spent countless hours putting together the project which included a display board and literature, along with a scrapbook and a PowerPoint presentation. In addition to those items, they also organized a demonstration component where the two took the message to a local elementary school.

Before the presentation, Ransdell and Hunter and their Health Sciences Instructor Tonya Lindsay handed out pieces of paper with bully words written on each. The students held on to those words during the presentation. Afterward, the papers were collected and attached to helium balloons. The whole class went outside and released the balloons symbolizing the release of those mean words and thus creating a bully-free school.

To follow up, Ransdell and Hunter returned to the school the next day and spent lunch time connecting students with friends they did not know. The group then signed a “bully-free zone” banner that will hang in the school.

All the activities were designed to send a message to the elementary students – don’t bully for any reason and accept each other’s differences.

While the message was intended to be for younger students, created with their age in mind and in a way they understand, Ransdell said the facts are tough and tragic in many instances, something older students see and experience all too often.

She pointed out that many kids try to shrug off a harassing comment and pretend it doesn't bother them but that often leads to depression, especially if that person has troubles at home or at work.

According to multiple sources collected by the American Psychological Association, bullying has been found to be related to negative psychosocial functioning among children who are victimized and results in lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and higher rates of school absenteeism.

Hunter said after working on the project she discovered the problem to be just as traumatic for the younger students as those her age.

"I never realized it was as bad for the younger kids. When we got to the school, so many were saying they had been bullied every day," she said. "It just shocked me. I thought the younger kids were more accepting of each other."

Hunter also said she feels like most young people get bullied in some way, at some time. With that said, she also thinks there are positive instances where these young students really are accepting of others and bullying doesn't become an issue, But it's rare, she said.

Lindsay said the subject of bullying fits well into what she is teaching in Health Sciences since it can and does affect a victim's physical health.

"My students see firsthand that we are all the same from a physical standpoint in how our bodies work. Therefore we should treat each other the same," she said. "We are all the same inside."

Lindsay added that bringing up the subject of bullying gets students talking about it. She said opening the lines of communications can ultimately put a dent in the problem.

A story board and written summary of the project was created and was judged as part of the classroom's HOSA activities leading up to the state conference in March 2013. The display will now be placed in competition with other state projects at the conference.

Ransdell and Hunter plan to take their presentation to other schools and both emphasize it will take all people realizing the harm bullying can cause before it will go away.

"But I am bound and determined," said Ransdell. "We want to make a difference."